

Long Island Duck Farms

Photo: L.I. Studies Inst., Holstra University,
Nassau County Museum



How did the Peking duck get to Long Island? According to legend, in 1870, a Long Island sailor traveled to China and returned with nine of the snowy-white, orange-beaked Peking ducks. These ducks thrived on Long Island's splendid waterways when shelter was provided them for the cold winters.

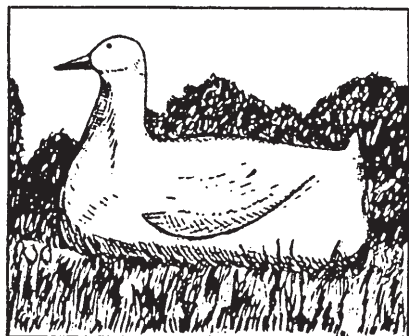
As Peking duck meat was especially succulent, its marketing potential soon became evident to Long Islanders. Duck farms, sometimes known as duck ranches, sprang up all over Suffolk County, producing 60% of the nation's ducks by 1969. Today that figure has dropped to below 15% due to escalating land values, increased production costs, and environmental concerns.

Long Island duckling can still be found as a menu offering at the finest restaurants around the world.



Ser. No. 318,066. Martin R. Maurer, Riverhead, N. Y. Filed Aug. 17, 1931

The Big Duck Ranch



From The U.S. Patent Office Official Gazette, November, 1932, page 35.

The Big Duck Store features many duck-inspired souvenirs. Find Big Duck T-shirts, sweatshirts, caps, magnets, key chains, mugs, note cards, holiday ornaments and children's items as well as other DUCK-A-BILIA.

Also find many local products: Long Island jams and jellies and other foodstuffs, books on local history, Long Island seaside photography and artwork, calendars, postcards and much more!

Cold drinks and snacks, too!



BIG DUCK ANNUAL HOLIDAY LIGHTING 1st Wednesday after Thanksgiving



In cooperation with the L.I. Convention and Visitors Bureau, The Big Duck will also serve as the official East End Visitors Center containing information regarding L.I. travel and tourism.

Directions to The Big Duck

- ✧ From the L.I.E., exit 71 take Route 24 south through the Riverhead traffic circle. Cross Route 105 and continue 1 mile on Route 24 to The Big Duck on the left, right next to the Flanders Men's Club.
- ✧ From Sunrise Highway, take exit 65N, Riverhead, and travel 5 miles on Route 24, to The Big Duck, on the right, next to the Flanders Men's Club.

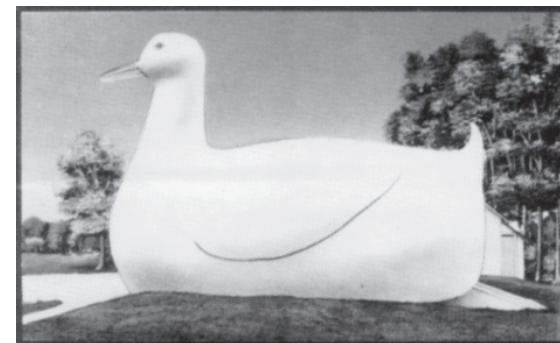


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The Big Duck

Listed on the National Register of
Historic Places

Route 24, Flanders
Suffolk County, New York



Since 1931

Steven Bellone
Suffolk County Executive

Greg Dawson
Commissioner

Suffolk County
Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation
Division of Historic Services



(631) 852-3377



HISTORY OF THE BIG DUCK

In 1931, Riverhead duck farmer Martin Maurer and his wife Jeule decided to construct a giant duck-shaped duck shop. They hoped to sell the Peking ducks they raised to passing motorists who would surely be drawn to the striking form of a “big duck” along Riverhead’s West Main Street. The Maurers envisioned this plan while vacationing in California where they are known to have visited a roadside coffee shop shaped like a giant coffee pot.

Seeking local assistance, the Maurers hired carpenter George Reeve and two eccentric stage show set designers, brothers William and Samuel Collins. A live duck tied with a string to their porch served as a model for the Collins’ design. Reeve studied the carcass of a cooked chicken in order to create a sturdy, bird-accurate frame-work for the building. Construction of The Big Duck had begun!

After The Big Duck’s wooden frame had been pieced together, wire mesh was attached. Cement was applied to the wire mesh with the assistance of Smith and Yeager Builders. The Big Duck was painted a lovely bright white, save for the beak, of course, which was given its street-line orange color. The finishing touch was the placement of two Model-T taillights in The Big Duck’s head for eyes that would glow red at night. The Big Duck in its entirety measures 30 feet from beak to perky tail, 15 feet from folded wing to folded wing, and 20 feet from its base to the top of its head. As duck farms in the 1930’s were commonly known as duck ranches, Martin Maurer had his giant duck shop and business trademarked as *The Big Duck Ranch*.

The Big Duck roosted at The Big Duck Ranch on West Main Street till 1936. The Maurers had sold quite a few ducks from their unique shop and decided to relocate, Big Duck and all, to Route 24 in Flanders. The Flanders

community welcomed The Big Duck with open arms and have cherished it ever since.

The Big Duck’s popularity grew, and continues to grow, steadily. When the land where The Big Duck rested was slated for development in 1987, Big Duck fans from all over joined Suffolk County in an effort to preserve The Big Duck. The Big Duck’s then current owners, Kia and Pouran Eshghi, generously donated The Big Duck to Suffolk County in December of 1987.

The Big Duck is now open to the public as a gift shop. Unusual Peking duck merchandise, lovingly referred to as duck-a-bilia, along with other Long Island specialties, now fills The Big Duck Store.



The Big Duck, as it appeared in the Nov., 1932 issue of *Popular Mechanics*.

World Famous Duck Architecture

While The Big Duck is a well-known Long Island landmark, it has also lent its name to a specific style of roadside architecture. The architectural term, “duck,” was coined by architects Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown in 1968. Duck buildings are highly sculptural forms which represent products or services available within, as opposed to the more common “decorated sheds” which are plain buildings whose functions are revealed by added signage.

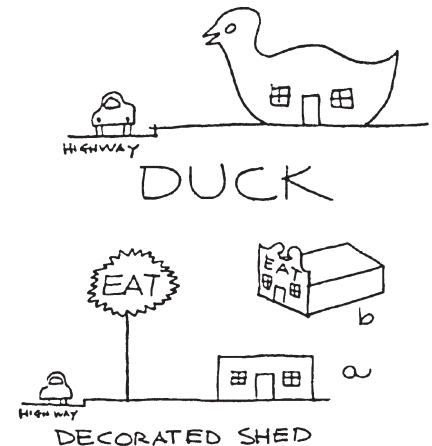


Illustration from *Learning From Las Vegas*, Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, 1972.

With Suffolk County’s Big Duck, as with other architectural ducks, the building itself is the signage, a colossal, three-dimensional, representational advertisement. Designed to mesmerize passing motorists and entice them ultimately to a purchase, ducks are fantastical while retaining their purely practical intentions. The Big Duck has become the most famous example of roadside architecture.

Another well-known architect named James Wines has proposed the Duck Design Theory - D.D.T. - part of which states: “Form follows fantasy not function, for architecture that cannot offer fantasy fails man’s need to dream.”